

tizer, it is useful. But a person's tolerance declines with age, so alcohol should be taken with great moderation. A good rule is never to drink alone: all too many widows and retired professional women fall into that trap.

Exercise is important both for the improvement and maintenance of good physical function and, like health food, is witnessing a surge of popularity at present. If you want to take up jazz dancing or jogging or swimming for the first time, go ahead and enjoy yourself. Being less inhibited is normal in our later years, and society quite likes us when we are eccentric. Preventive health care, however, is one area in which we may have sex-related difficulties. The male doctors whom we consult all too often write off our concerns because 'you women are all alike.' Insist on a thorough examination and consultations, if necessary. We are more fragile in old age but illness can still be prevented and treated.

The last prescription is to be positive both about one's life and one's self. Women have an advantage here because most of us feel accepted for what we are, whereas men feel accepted on the basis of their work role. We also adapt better than men to the inevitable changes in the rhythm of our lives. If suicide is used as an indicator, our greatest problems arise between the ages of forty-six and fifty-five; men's problems peak later, between sixty-six and seventy-one. Wrinkles and grey hair are insignificant to the healthy older woman. We do like to look nice, though, and here society makes it difficult for us. The

needle trade seems to forget that we exist; it is no easy job to fit our older figures into the youthful designs in the stores. Most of us are in the low-income group and cannot afford our own couturier, the salvation of the more affluent.

Positivism is highly individual and can be illustrated best by citing a few examples. My eighty-nine-year-old aunt used to sit patiently on her exercycle, pedalling away her arthritic stiffness. When I asked her if she found it boring, she replied with a smile, 'Oh no, dear. Every day I watch that little spider outside my window weaving his web. Nature is so wonderful.' Then there was my eighty-year-old uncle, to whom I suggested that tarring his roof was dangerous as 'he wasn't getting any younger.' He shot back at me: 'Yes, I know. And I also know that I'm not getting any older any faster than anyone else.' The late Madame Sarah Fischer declined admission to the old age home to which she had applied in her younger years. She chose to ignore the many physical problems with which she was beset in order to work on her personal papers, the record of her long and important musical career. Psychologist Erik Erikson has termed this last developmental phase of our lives 'ego integrity versus despair.' Regrettably, the geriatric units of our mental hospitals are bulging with those who have fallen prey to the latter.

When I retire next year, I know that there are many exciting possibilities open to me. I have my share of aches and pains and they are not likely to disappear; but, when there are so many pluses to look forward to, why be defeated by the minuses?

The Widows

The widows sat upon a large
maple porch
in a middling Ontario town
in the middle of an August summer.

The poplars made a rough brooch design
on the polished beams

and I couldn't tell them apart
from the straw and the ashes
and the humid repose
that swung gaily on the verandah
swing, with a glint
of all knowing in its eye.

They didn't seem to notice either,
plaiting their hair and gnashing
their teeth on home-made
apple butter,

for the deceased had simply gone in peace,
in God's way, like the passing of a season
or the coming of the hay; the
coming of young men round
to court and become husbands;
the passing of virginity
to wedlock and children,
sowing death all the while
in sweet repose,
swinging gainly on the
verandah swing.

Simmie Moore